

A Defense of the Nation and of the Kentuckians

The crisis of 1861 positions Kentucky in the middle of a national conflict that will forever shape American history. As a Jacksonian Democrat, the importance of preserving the Union is paramount; however, there are certain limitations placed on this objective. This is based on three main principles: one, the Union is a government of the people; two, secession is not justified by the Constitution unless in extreme cases of oppression; and three, all avenues of redress available in the Constitution must be exhausted before any form of revolution is undertaken. These three principles offer a clear framework by which the current crisis can be understood in light of the ideologies of Andrew Jackson and Daniel Webster while countering the ideologies of secessionists and reformers in Kentucky.

The definition of what constitutes a Union by itself is one of the main points of contention in the secessionist movement. The secessionists believe that a Union is a voluntary compact of states and therefore has the inalienable right to secede at any time, as espoused by John C. Calhoun. However, this is directly opposed by the ideologies of Andrew Jackson himself. During the Nullification Crisis of 1832, Andrew Jackson issued a proclamation in which he said, “The Constitution forms a government, not a league” (Jackson). The difference between a government and a league is significant in these terms because a league can be dissolved by any of the members involved in a compact; however, a government is a binding compact by which all citizens of a Union are beholden as a form of allegiance. The sovereignty of a Union can therefore not reside in individual states; rather, it must reside in citizens of the United States as a whole.

However, it is vital to note that the views expressed by Jackson on the consequences of disunion were not hypothetical in nature, since he continued with his argument, saying, “disunion, by armed force, is treason” (Jackson). It is evident, therefore, that the argument on the peaceful secession of states is a fallacy. As states secede one after another, the government becomes powerless, and the nation is thrown into darkness. The views expressed by the Jacksonians on the importance of the Union and a centralized government were not opinions but necessities.

The other argument, which is related to secession, is the argument on the “concurrent majority.” This argument is propounded by Calhoun. The argument on the “concurrent majority” holds that the federal government can act if there is a consensus on this in all parts of the country. It is vital to note, however, that this argument on the “concurrent majority” is closely related to the argument on secession. It is evident, however, that this argument on the “concurrent majority” is a fallacy. As earlier stated, the government can only function if it is able to override the views of the minority. It is evident, however, that the government can only function if it is able to override the views of the majority.

The importance of Union was also expressed by Daniel Webster, who says “Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!” (Webster). This quote explains that liberty is dependent on a strong Union, and without a strong Union, liberty cannot be ensured. Without a Union, there will not be liberty, but there will be a struggle for power amongst different factions.

Despite these arguments, the concerns of secessionists and those of the pro-reformers in Kentucky cannot be ignored. The election of Abraham Lincoln has led to concerns that the South will lose power, and its institutions, especially slavery, will be threatened. Not everyone is a secessionist, and not everyone who is a secessionist is sure of what will become of their future.

Bawyer Binton, a fellow Kentuckian, says, “free states are outperforming slave states economically by a dramatic margin, as evidenced by the decline of Southern exports and the rise of Northern industries” (Binton). What this implies is that the Southern economy, which is based on slavery, is probably in decline and will continue to decline in the future. Binton further says, “slavery is driving our people away and strangling our economy.” He further says, “slavery only benefits a small elite, leaving the common man in poverty.” This is a very important argument, as it explains a concern amongst some people in Kentucky that slavery is not only not benefiting their economy but is probably weakening their economy in the future. I am a Jacksonian Democrat and a strong supporter of the common man, so I cannot dismiss these arguments so readily.

Nevertheless, while Binton’s arguments against slavery are valid from an economic perspective, they do not constitute a valid reason for the dissolution of the Union. Furthermore, these arguments do not consider the broader economic and political situation in the South. The defenders of slavery, such as James Henry Hammond in his “Cotton Is King” speech, argue that “the Southern people are in the midst of a great and growing industry...which is of more importance to the world than all the cotton we can possibly grow.” Hammond continues with “Cotton is king,” stating “No power on earth dares to make war upon it” because of its global economic importance (“Cotton is King” by James Henry Hammond). Therefore, the Southern economy is not an economic weakness, as Binton suggests, but rather an important strength that the South can use as leverage against the North as well as the Europeans. The real enemies of the people are the bankers, who were defeated by Andrew Jackson. This is evidenced by the fact that “Jackson is still the only President who never had a public debt” (“Historical Debt Outstanding”).

Although slavery is either a positive or negative force in American society, there is the larger question of secession from the Union to support slavery. As to the question of secession, the principles of Jackson are very clear. Secession is to be considered only as a last resort and in the event of extreme oppression. Indeed, in a speech delivered in 1832, President Andrew Jackson said: "Secession, like any other revolutionary act, may be morally justified by the extremity of oppression; but to call it a constitutional right, is confounding the meaning of terms, and can only be done through gross error, or to deceive those who are willing to assert a right, but would pause before they made a revolution, or incur the penalties consequent upon a failure."

There are also mechanisms for addressing grievances of different sections of the population. The Constitution also provides for amendments and compromising solutions. Therefore, secession is not only premature but also dangerous. Moreover, Kentucky also needs to take a hard look at its role in this conflict. Being a border state, Kentucky is in a precarious position, and as Binton puts it, "conflicts would undoubtedly occur on our soil, in our homes, were we to succumb to this policy of disunion, and resort to war" (Binton). This clearly indicates the need for both state and national union, as a divided Kentucky will not only have to contend with external forces but also internal divisions.

From my own viewpoint, I demand that there be a dedication to the law. This means that the federal government needs to enforce its laws, and this needs to be supported by the citizens of the US, as made very clear by Jackson. However, if Kentucky does not support these laws, it will lead to its own destruction. But I also need to be vigilant about the possible federal overreach. Their commitment to the Union is not absolute. The Union needs to respect the Constitution. Therefore, if the Union oversteps the bounds of the Constitution, then the rationale

for staying in the Union is no longer valid. My arguments will show the reader a fair-minded view on the current crisis of secession. They affirm the fact that the Union is a government of the people, they reject the idea of secession on constitutional grounds, and they affirm the idea of using all other avenues before considering the idea of revolution. While considering the arguments against slavery by Bawyer Binton and the arguments for slavery by Hammond, this perspective still puts the Union first. By using these arguments, the state of Kentucky can work its way through this crisis in a prudent and noble way, avoiding the chance to become the generation that destroys the Union for which all previous generations have sacrificed.

References

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